



**Masonboro Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, December 9, 2013, 6 pm**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
NC Audubon, Walker Golder	No
Friends of the Reserve (FOR), Joanne Harcke	Yes
New Hanover County Sheriff's Office, Lieutenant Matt Payne	Yes
New Hanover County Planning Department, Chris O'Keefe	No
NC Coastal Land Trust, Jesica Blake	Yes
Division of Marine Fisheries, Chip Collier	No
Division of Parks and Recreation – CB, Chris Helms	Yes
Town of Wrightsville Beach	No
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Neal Andrew	Yes
Richard Cecelski	Yes
Masonboro.org – Richard Johnson	Yes
Haywood Newkirk	Yes
William Raney	Yes
Pat Rittenmeyer	Yes
Sam Romano	No
Dr. Anthony Snider	No
Dr. Amanda Southwood-Williard	No
Surfrider, Cape Fear – Sean Ahlum	Yes
Ted Wilgis	Yes
Martin Willard	Yes
<u>Others Present</u>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager	
Rebecca Ellin, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Reserve Manager	
Maggie Geck, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Americorps Member	

Reserve-wide Update

Administrative Update

- *Staffing News*
 - Lori Davis, Education Coordinator for the Reserve, recently received the 2013 Environmental Educator of the Year Award from the Environmental Educators of North Carolina.
 - Maggie Geck began her Americorps service with the Reserve. In her ten months of service, she will be working to strengthen the Southern Sites office's volunteer program and supporting a variety of outreach activities.
- *Budget Update*

The Reserve receives funding from both the State of N.C. and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for operation of the program and a budget update was provided for the current fiscal year. The Reserve's total budget for FY13-14 is \$877,653 (\$265,000 from State appropriations and \$612,653 from NOAA, 90% of the NOAA funds support operation of the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve (NCNERR)); this is a \$34,754 reduction in federal funding for operation of the NCNERR and excludes any external competitive grant funds.
- *Rules and Policies Review Process*

The Reserve is not pursuing the update of its rules and policies at this time.

Reserve Communications

Website

- The Reserve is in the process of transferring its website to a new DENR hosting portal. This will help brand the Reserve as part of the Division of Coastal Management and establish consistency between DENR agencies, as well as providing more comprehensive and current information for website visitors in an easy-to-navigate format. The new website will be published in December 2013.
- The Hot Topics section of the current website is updated weekly to announce upcoming events/meetings, review projects and field trips, and establish a consistent "voice" for the Reserve that keeps website visitors excited about our work. The Hot Topics Archive can be found at the following link and will also be available on our new website:
<http://www.nccoastalreserve.net/Resources/Hot-Topics-Archives/225.aspx>

Facebook

- The Reserve has three Facebook pages: Rachel Carson, Masonboro Island, and a general N.C. Coastal Reserve page. Facebook is useful for interacting with visitors and community members that are interested in Reserve activities. Options for liking, sharing, and commenting on our pages mean that Reserve staff can listen to and educate the public in an informal setting.
- The Facebook pages reach hundreds of people each day (range of people viewing a post between July and October 2013 for Rachel Carson: 250-2,200; N.C. Coastal Reserve: 89-1,300; and Masonboro Island: 470-5,000).

Newsletter

- The Reserve redesigned its newsletter, the [*Tidal Flat*](#). The new version comes directly to your email inbox in a colorful new format. Local advisory committee members should have received a copy of the September 2013 issue via email; please let us know if you did not. The issue is also available on our website. A December newsletter is in development.

Local Advisory Committee Operating Procedures

The Local Advisory Committee (LAC) Operating Procedures document was updated based on input from LAC members and staff, replacing the original version. No substantive changes were recommended by either LAC members or staff and thus, all changes are minor and serve to simplify or clarify without changing process or intent. The document you received is the final updated version with comments inserted to highlight the simplified or clarified language. A final PDF version without the comments will be emailed to committee members in December and posted on the Reserve website. Two updates to note: future committee meeting agendas will include more detail to preview discussion topics and action items will be employed to follow up on recommendations from the meetings as appropriate. Thank you to all committee members who reviewed the document and provided comments.

Site Update and Old Business

Species of concern monitoring programs

Sea turtle monitoring season concluded with 29 nests and 23 false crawls identified. Seven nests were partially predated, resulting in a predation level of 24%. This is down from an average of 57% over the past six seasons. Thirty volunteers completed a total of 510 hours of volunteer effort through this program.

Oystercatcher nesting was monitored by Audubon staff between April 19 and August 12. Thirty-four pairs of American oystercatchers produced 49 nests, with 9 chicks eventually fledging. Productivity, measured as fledglings/pair, was 0.26, below the 0.35 recommended for population maintenance and 0.50 recommended for species recovery. Approximately 75% of nests failed, as measured by nests with eggs hatching. Nest failures were due to predation (35%), human disturbance (7.5%), abandonment (10%), and overwash (2.5%), but the reason for failure was not able to be determined for 45% of nests. Audubon does not have funding to support monitoring during the 2014 season. The Site Manager is looking into other possible sources of funding to ensure that regular monitoring can continue to increase understanding of the effectiveness of predator removal efforts.

Diamondback terrapin activities were limited to supporting transportation for a UNCW researcher from the Williard lab to examine the effectiveness of several sizes of excluder devices.

Visitor Use Monitoring

Collection of baseline data associated with the pilot project to calculate an annual visitor use number wrapped up in October. The number calculated by the statistical model for total annual visitation was 94,234. Some questions remain regarding whether extreme low use days as a result of weather conditions are taken into account effectively and whether this is contributing to the higher than expected number. The Site Manager will be revisiting this question with the statistician who developed the model.

Habitat Mapping

As part of an effort at the National Estuarine Research Reserve System level, mapping of Reserve habitats was completed this year. This project characterizes, classifies, and displays the habitats within the Reserve utilizing a remote sensing process in which aerial photos are digitized by hand and randomly selected points are visited to assess the accuracy of the remotely assigned classifications. Habitats are classified using a classification system developed by the NERRS to reflect aspects of habitats important to estuarine environments, including degree of exposure to inundation, position within watershed, and type of substrate or vegetation. This process is to be repeated on a periodic basis to assess habitat change over time. Data and maps related to this effort will be available to the public through the Centralized Data Management Office's website.

Research activities

Ongoing water quality monitoring activities were completed with no interruptions. Monitoring of the emergent marsh was completed using permanent transects from the sound water to the upland edge along the back side of the island adjacent to Loosins Creek. This effort collects a variety of data, including species composition, stem density and height, groundwater levels, and marsh surface elevation, to understand change in the marsh over time. This project is part of an initiative associated with the National Estuarine Research Reserve System.

Outreach programs

A total of 26 outreach programs were offered between June 12 and November 6 with 222 total attendees. The most popular programs were a sea turtle nest excavation, a kayak trip, the Incredible Oyster program offered in conjunction with the UNCW Shellfish Research Hatchery, and the End of Season Report presentation. The sea turtle informational meeting is scheduled for April 24th at 6 pm. New outreach programs in development include a general presentation to be offered to community groups and a marine debris program to be offered to organizations planning to conduct a marine debris removal.

Volunteer programs

New and ongoing volunteer opportunities were recently highlighted at an evening presentation and recruiting event. These projects have also been discussed in the new e-newsletter, Masonboro Opportunities. Volunteer activities include: Feather Friends – an opportunity to assist with nesting bird protection by adopting a protected area and maintaining the postings through the season; Ambassadors – trained volunteers will lead hikes on the Third Beach nature trail; Terrapin Tally – a citizen science effort being created in collaboration with the

Wildlife Resources Commission to record the presence of diamondback terrapins utilizing smart phones; photopoint monitoring – assessing change over time through periodic image capture and analysis; sea turtle monitoring – opportunities for volunteers to support this effort will continue as in previous seasons. More information about these programs will be forthcoming in the next edition of the e-newsletter in January, as well as being highlighted in Facebook postings.

July Fourth

The 2013 holiday gathering was marked by significantly less problematic behavior than 2012. The Division worked closely with the New Hanover County Sheriff's Office (NHCSO) and other law enforcement and safety agencies to plan for and coordinate the July Fourth operation. A command center set up at the Coast Guard station greatly increased communication and efficiency of response among law enforcement agencies. Of the increased budget for supplemental law enforcement available, \$7395 was used. This enabled the NCHSO to increase the number of officers present and the number of hours they were on site to address safety and property damage concerns. The Division and Reserve staff's public relations efforts included radio, television, print, and social media information and messages regarding responsible use, safety, and the increased law enforcement presence. Temporary signage was also placed on site to serve as geographical reference to support law enforcement operations and to encourage responsible behavior. Masonboro.org volunteers reported an atmosphere similar to a college tailgate party and suggested that the community views attendance at the party as a rite of passage. They removed approximately 4000 pounds of trash from the island throughout the day and evening. It was noted that the number of visitors stranded on the island late in the day appeared to be lower, perhaps due to a change in strategy by the Wrightsville Beach Police Department to address illegal transport boats earlier in the day prior to passengers being transported to the island.

Discussion resulted in the overall conclusion that the formula used for 2013 was good and that similar efforts in future years should be used. It was also noted that it appears that the large gathering of young people at First Beach only occurs on the Fourth, regardless of the day of the week, so it is possible that future efforts could focus almost exclusively on this single date.

New Business

Elementary education program – Masonboro.org invite Reserve staff to discuss the possible involvement of Reserve staff in their organization's newly created Island Explorers program. Haywood Newkirk is leading this effort to provide field trips and environmental education programs to elementary students in New Hanover County. Masonboro.org conducted a pilot of the program during the fall and is planning to expand the program in the spring. Friends of the Reserve, with support from Reserve staff, submitted a grant to the KEEN Corporation to provide funding to support Reserve education staff's participation in this program.

Member Roundtable

- Ms. Blake reported that no new acquisitions have occurred, but tax credit changes that will occur on December 31 have initiated one potential acquisition.
- Mr. Cecelski reported that his company completed several cleanups at the south end of the island through the fall. He also stated that he has seen impacts to the dunes from campers in the area, likely as a result of little beach area available at high tide as the south end has eroded. He commended Masonboro.org in its educational efforts.
- Mr. Wilgis reported that the new N.C. Coastal Federation Office and Education Center on Wrightsville Beach will open in February.
- Mr. Ahlum reported that Surfrider is involved with an ocean-friendly garden project at Tidal Creek Cooperative. This project, which supports the City of Wilmington's Hewletts and Bradley Creek Watershed Restoration project, will be used as an educational demonstration of micro-watershed management alternatives.
- Mr. Andrew acknowledged the positive movement that is occurring in several areas, including the outreach and education efforts and the July Fourth approach.
- Mr. Johnson congratulated Mr. Andrew on his recent appointment to the Coastal Resources Commission.

Meeting Follow Up and Action Items

- Proposed meeting dates for 2014: March 19, June 18 and September 17 from 4-6 pm.
- Ms. Ellin will develop a more detailed budget summary to help members understand funding and program allocations.
- The possibility of forming work groups or subcommittees to be involved with specific topics or activities will be added as a discussion item for the next meeting and Reserve staff will propose possible work group topics.
- Ms. Ellin and Ms. Sutton will explore options for DCM accepting donations from entities other than its recognized support organization, Friends of the Reserve.
- Ms. Sutton will ask the environmental educator responsible for managing the Masonboro Island Facebook page to send copy from Facebook postings out to other organizations so that it can be posted as a new post rather than being shared, in order to maximize views.